

Maintaining or Improving Natural Resources
Recommendation to Amend NOSB Organic System Plan Template
NOSB Crops Committee Working Draft
Submitted July 14, 2005

Introduction:

The Crops Committee, with assistance from the Wild Farm Alliance (WFA) and National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), has developed a recommendation to implement the existing biodiversity conservation requirements of the National Organic Program (NOP) rule by adding language to the Natural Resources section of the NOSB's existing model Organic System Plan.

Background:

The NOP rule definition of "organic production" includes requirements to "promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity." The preamble to the Final Rule explicitly states, "The use of 'conserve' establishes that the producer must initiate practices to support biodiversity and avoid, to the extent practicable, any activities that would diminish it." In section 205.200, the rule states, "Production practices...must maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation, including soil, water, wetlands, woodlands and wildlife."

The Independent Organic Inspectors Association first called attention to the fact that biodiversity educational materials and criteria were needed for their inspector trainings and requested that the Wild Farm Alliance (WFA) assist them with this effort. Through support of the Organic Farming Research Foundation and others, WFA formed a broad-based working group of organic farmers, certifiers and conservationists to develop biodiversity criteria and supporting guides for farmers, inspectors, and certifiers.

At the NOSB's fall 2004 meeting, WFA requested that the Board approve biodiversity criteria into their model Organic System Plan. The request was sent to the Crops Committee and over the winter revisions were made. The Board then unanimously agreed to approve draft text on biodiversity conservation at their spring 2005 meeting. Further refinement occurred with assistance from the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). The recommended text below is the product of that collaboration.

Many certifiers have adopted the NOSB's model OSP forms, even though use of the forms is not required for accreditation. The existence and use of the model forms helps bring consistency to inspection, certification, and accreditation processes. Approval of the biodiversity amendment to the NOSB's model OSP will provide transparent and predictable guidance to farmers, inspectors, certifiers, and accreditation auditors.

Recommendation:

The Crops Committee recommends that the following text be added to the NOSB Organic System Plan template:

D. NATURAL RESOURCES:

NOP Rule 205.2 defines Organic Production as a production system managed in accordance with the Act and its regulations to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. NOP Rule 205.200 and 205.203(a) requires that production practices maintain or improve natural resources (soil and water quality, wetlands, woodlands and wildlife) of the operation.

BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Whole Farm Biodiversity Considerations:

Does your field map include features such as hedgerows, woodlands, wetlands, riparian zones, and special habitats?

☐ yes ☐ no

List wildlife and dominant native plants present on the farm: (note priority species)

What steps do you take to plan/provide for biodiversity conservation?

☐ understand farm's location within watershed ☐ ascertain what wildlife and dominant native plants existed on the land prior to farming

☐ learn about regional natural areas and conservation priorities ☐ work with neighbors/others to enhance biodiversity (connectivity, restoration, etc.) ☐ other* describe/explain:

How do you manage water for the needs of crops/livestock, native species and riparian ecosystems?

☐ plant regionally appropriate crops ☐ conserve water ☐ manage water for priority species ☐ retain/restore vegetated riparian buffers/wetlands ☐ protect/improve natural hydrology/ecological function of riparian area ☐ other*

Uncultivated Area Biodiversity:**What actions do you take to provide habitat for pollinators, insect predators, birds and bats?**

☐ bird/bat/bee boxes ☐ hedgerows/windbreaks ☐ maintain/provide natural roosting/nesting/foraging sites ☐ other*

How are you restoring and/or protecting natural areas?

☐ manage for native plants/wildlife specific to the site ☐ preserve/restore wildlife corridors/large blocks of habitat ☐ establish legal conservation areas ☐ native habitats not converted to farmland since certification ☐ other*

List problem invasives:**What actions do you take to control invasive plant/animal species, especially those threatening natural areas?**

☐ learn about invasives ☐ use weed- and pest-free seed/planting stock/soil amendments/mulches ☐ monitor for new introductions and control immediately ☐ suppress invasives using organic methods ☐ other*

Cropland Area Biodiversity:**How do you conserve and provide habitat for wildlife?**

☐ companion planting/intercropping ☐ crop diversity ☐ wildlife-friendly fences ☐ manage fallow fields for wildlife ☐ other*

Do you schedule farm practices to benefit wildlife?

☐ avoid nests during breeding season ☐ stagger mowing/tilling practices ☐ plan fields to leave food/cover for wildlife ☐ other*

Biodiversity When Livestock are Involved:**How do you protect riparian areas and sensitive habitats?**

☐ fence to minimize impacting wildlife ☐ control sensitive area access ☐ prevent bank erosion ☐ animals fed away from water ☐ other*

What are you doing to improve your pasture or rangeland?

☐ prevent overgrazing ☐ reseed/protect trampled/eroded areas ☐ plant native pasture ☐
ecologically-sound grazing system ☐ prescribed burning ☐ other*

What wildlife-friendly management practices do you use?

☐ guard animals ☐ grazing scheduled when predation pressure low ☐ livestock spend night in
protected area ☐ circumstances of livestock death documented ☐ other* ☐ list problems with
predators or other wildlife: _____

**Have you assessed the farm for biodiversity problems and greatest opportunities, and developed
goals a timeline for biodiversity conservation?** ☐ yes ☐ no describe/explain:

How do you monitor farm biodiversity?

☐ visually ☐ species counts ☐ other*

Wild Harvest Enterprises Biodiversity:

How do you maintain or improve the sustainability of the harvested species?

☐ harvest from stable populations ☐ minimize disruption of priority species/sensitive habitats ☐ avoid
erosion ☐ allow re-establishment ☐ monitor wild crop sustainability ☐ other*

***If you check other, please explain.**

***Add the following boxes under the Natural Resources: Water Use: What practices are used to
protect water quality?***

☐ sediment basin ☐ compost/fertilizer stored away from water

Committee vote:

Pending